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Caffey, Francis G.

National unity

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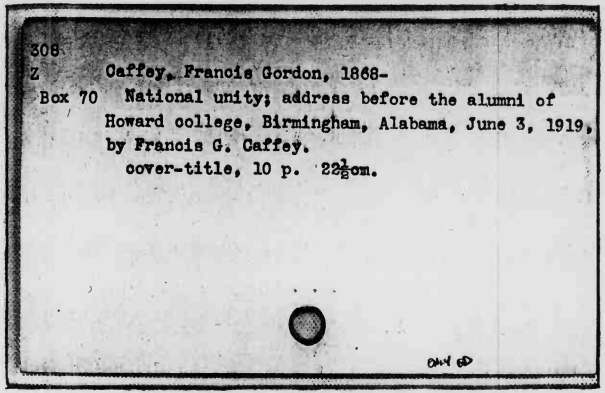
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NATIONAL UNITY

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Address before the Alumni of Howard College,
Birmingham, Alabama

June 3, 1919

By Francis G. Caffey

17 March, 1920 - C.R.W.

NATIONAL UNITY

Address before the Alumni of Howard College, Birmingham, Alabama, June 3, 1919

By Francis G. Caffey

The fourteenth day of the present month will be the thirty-second anniversary of my graduation from Howard College. The incidents between leaving my Lowndes County home in 1883 and getting my degree in 1887 are vivid in my recollection. My mind is flooded with memories of them.

It would be a pleasure to spend my entire allotted time in recounting the events of the four sessions at Marion. I should rejoice to describe at length the privilege of being a pupil of Colonel Murfee, Professor Dill and their faculty associates. But, for the purposes of this occasion, I shall refer generally only to conditions as they existed in my college days. The very greatness of the debt to the tutelage of those days puts upon us a special obligation now to help in preserving the unity attained by the Nation in the World War. Of that unity I wish to speak.

The intervening third of a century has wrought many changes,—perhaps of greater significance for us than those of any other equal number of years in our history.

Life in the eighties was relatively simple. The South had not recovered from the effects of the

Civil War. The people of this State were poor. They were still struggling to overcome the difficulties resulting from four years of strife. They were absorbed in their individual affairs; principally in making a living. The attention of the country was concentrated on domestic concerns. The balance of the world seemed quite remote.

Contrast the present! How prodigious the shifting of the drama! Now, Alabama is prosperous; the United States is the richest of all countries; agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, invention, education, government and social relations have made enormous strides.

Formerly our view of life could be provincial; now it must be extensive. Formerly we were free to restrict the field of our interests and our duties; now we are forced to look at things not with a national mind only, but with an international mind as well. Willingly or not—whether with or without design—our country is a world power. We are obliged to meet the increased responsibility. How shall we do it?

The greatest event between the Commencement of 1887 and the Commencement of 1919 is the latest. For nearly five—particularly for the past two—years our energies—our very natures—have been so engrossed that we have had little time to reflect. With the coming of reflection it is plain that no civilized part of the globe can be, and no uncivilized part ought to be, what it was prior to August, 1914. The new conditions compel every country to consider its fellow-countries in much the same way that every inhabitant of a village is compelled by the mere fact of his community membership to consider his fellow-inhabitants of that village.

How can the United States perform the new duties? One may not, with a feeling of assurance, be

able to make comprehensive answer; but it is certain that the steady, conscious cultivation of National Unity is necessary if we are adequately to do our part.

Is the maintenance of a high degree of National Unity impracticable? Is it even difficult? I think not. We have but the very direct task of reaping the blessings of the war through which we have just passed.

It is impossible to measure the compensations for the sufferings of the war. Our gains have been both material and spiritual.

One chief benefit has been the halting of the mad rush for wealth; another, the curbing of extravagance. Economy has been somewhat reinstated. There is recognition anew that saving is a virtue. We have learned that we still have ideals; that only proper occasion is needed to call them into predominance; that our people are capable of retaining a sense of gratitude after the lapse of one hundred and forty years. We have learned that, however great the diversity in the types of the population and in the characteristics of the various sections of the country, in the essentials we are substantially homogeneous; that even the fresh arrivals on our shores, for the most part, had imbibed the teachings of freedom; that the naturalized and the children of the naturalized, with rare exceptions only, took their places joyously in the battle for civilization by the side of those who had inherited the traditions of our Revolutionary ancestors. The lesson is that liberty breeds men.

The Gentile, the Jew, the Protestant, the Catholic, the educated, the uneducated, the New Englander, the Southerner, the man from the Middle West, the man from the Pacific Coast,—all have joined together. The result is that we know each

other better; we have more in common. Free as we are in thought and speech, assured as we are of liberty of thought and speech, the war has taught us to think more alike, to feel more alike. Just as unity of command won the war, so the greater unity in the thoughts and feelings of our people brought by the war has increased the strength of the country. Continuance of unity of spirit will afford us the only chance of retaining leadership of the world.

Today we honor and rejoice in Father Duffy just as we honor and rejoice in Corporal Manning. It makes no difference that one was in the Fighting 69th New York; the other, in the Fighting 4th Alabama. We care not that one is a parish priest in a borough of New York City; the other, a farmer lad in an agricultural county of Alabama. Both have demonstrated their worth. Both have lived up to the best American traditions. Both have set mankind an example of courage, unselfishness and self-sacrifice. Our debt to each is the same. The benefit will be lasting in proportion as we treasure it as a reason for maintaining National Unity.

Whether hereafter we are to employ our national power in isolation or in conjunction with others, we shall need Father Duffys and Corporal Mannings. The copartners in and the successors to their willingness to spend themselves for others, in co-operation with others for the sake of humanity, through all the ranks of endeavor, are the hope of the country, are the hope of the world.

Another benefit from the war has been so large that its value is difficult to estimate. It is not an overstimate to say that the working of the Selective Draft Act is the most signal, concrete illustration since the Revolution of the capacity of the

American people for self-government. Just as the effect on our national consciousness was immediate, the influence should be lasting.

Preceding the war, class feeling was growing apace; the power of group suggestion, without appeal to reason, was becoming increasingly a menace. The selection of men from every walk of life, without regard to social or financial relations, has instilled a new faith in democracy. No one will be able to get the baker's son and the banker's son who have served together in the same enterprise, on the same terms, to feel that they are enemies or that the social groups in which fortune has placed them are enemies. Class hatred thrives almost exclusively on ignorance of facts and consequent misunderstanding. To no single thing so much as to the draft is due the disintegration of the influence of those whose purpose has been to promote such hatred.

We hear much about Bolshevism. I live in a district containing a population larger in number, more dense, more diversified, than in any other territory of equal area in the United States. My work for the past two years has dealt solely with the administration of public justice in that district. The opportunity there for the growth of antagonism and for retarding unity of spirit is perhaps greater than anywhere else in the United States. Yet, based on the teachings of my experience, I have no apprehension.

Though watchful and firm, we can afford to be calm while hysteria runs its course and those who violate the law are punished in orderly fashion. The places where reflection prevails need not be disturbed by excitement at points of congestion.

The superheated atmosphere which frequently accompanies concentration makes propaganda appear more potent than actually it is. The saving grace in America is common sense. It is characteristic of our people. It alone is sufficient safeguard against the new heresy in this country. The return of our soldiers and sailors to civil life makes assurance doubly sure.

Bolshevism is the antithesis of democracy. It preaches the rule of a class. In America we are committed to democracy. We have tested it; we are satisfied with it; we rejoice in it.

That there are—perhaps always will be—just grounds for some discontent, no one who is candid will deny. But fair contentment may be counted on when, after opportunity to each upon full information to express himself, the majority will prevails. The problem is one of method; it is to obtain unity of spirit,—an equal desire to treat men justly; to serve according to their deserts the poor and the rich, the ignorant and the learned, the unfortunate and the successful. National Unity will solve our difficulties. With it, the spectre of Bolshevism will pass, as has passed every other alarmist cry.

One of the banes of American political life for more than fifty years has been the influence of appeals to sectional feeling. One of the consequences of this war to be expected is the annihilation of the last embers of that fire. Nearly half my life has been spent in the North; for three-fourths of the years since I attained my majority the North has been my home. I yield to no man in reverence for the traditions of my family and the traditions of Alabama, the State of my birth. Yet, I avow the belief that only acquaintanceship and association

with one's fellow-citizens in other parts of the country are required to make one thoroughly despise the narrowness and selfishness of sectionalism. It is inconceivable to me that the men who have camped together and fought side by side in the common cause will ever again permit political profit to accrue from appeals to sections of this republic, because of past differences, to array themselves against each other. What the passing years and the Spanish War left uncompleted in this regard, the present war I trust has finished for all time.

Though recent experiences entitle us to be proud, much remains to be done. The draft has revealed startling defects in the health and in the education of men of military age. The war has shown an astonishing ignorance or disregard of our language and of our institutions among certain groups of the population. The disturbances inevitably resulting from war require vast readjustments before the normal course of affairs is completely resumed. The problems are social, educational, economic and political. Solutions ought to be found. They will be found.

The handicap of inferior physiques must be overcome. The waste of illiteracy must be eliminated. Incomplete assimilation into our citizenship of those who would make America their home is intolerable. Efficiency in agriculture, in manufacture, in all business, is demanded by every intelligent conception of our task. To attain the purpose in view the principal needs are the preservation and the growth of the solidarity of the sentiment for our country—our great country—which the war has accentuated as never before.

If we but survey conditions, analyze them in the light of the teachings of history, and face them frankly, resolutely, we have nothing to fear from the future; we can look forward buoyantly and confidently to what is to come.

When the Articles of Confederation were adopted, Boston was more distant from Charleston than today Petrograd is from Chicago; conditions in the Green Mountains were more divergent from those on the James River than today are the conditions in a Swiss town from those in Clanton, Alabama. Improvements in transportation, communication and education have made it easier today for one in a remote American village to learn the facts upon which to form a just opinion as to a world issue than in our Revolutionary period it was for an American statesman to learn enough to guide him in deciding what position he ought to take with respect to the deficiencies in the Articles of Confederation.

The association of Americans in the struggle for the independence of the thirteen colonies led eventually to the Constitution. Participation in the present war has equally prepared the people of the world for a federation of friendship and the people of America for membership in that federation.

The Constitution left some things unsettled. A bitter struggle followed before those things were settled. So, the adjustments of the Peace Conference may fail—doubtless will fail—to prevent future strife; none should be so sanguine as to expect war never to occur again. But as the wisdom of the Constitution preserved the Union—a result for which all of us are now so thankful—may we not hope for a like outcome from the associations of the World War?

If there be possibility of devising for the free peoples of the earth a piece of governmental machinery designed to assure happiness, and the blessings of law, order and equal justice, even partially so efficient as for ourselves organization under the Constitution of the United States has demonstrated itself to be, should we not be glad to have a share in it; should we not cheerfully assume the burdens that may be entailed? Shall we make good the promise of American unity, sanctified by the blood American youths have shed in France, unless we carry through to that end?

I should be very nearly hopeless of civilization if some deliberate effort for its preservation and security other than by force of arms did not result from the war. The horrors of the recent years would be the more bearable if the outcome were the creation of a new instrumentality, effective throughout the world, for keeping—even for attempting to keep—the peace; for preventing—even for deterring—resort to the battlefield as the forum for international settlements.

There is no inconsistency between our maintenance of National Unity and our participation in a Society of Nations. On the contrary, if we assume the new responsibilities, we cannot meet them fully without unity in our own country; all the greater will be the need for the concert and the support which in a democracy come alone from common spirit among the people.

The fostering of National Unity does not involve repression either of opinion or of expression of opinion. One of the glories of our form of government is that our institutions include devices for securing unhampered popular verdicts. Publicity of the facts, free assembly and fair opportunity are essential to the existence of genuine democracy.

They are equally essential to National Unity. Nothing would the more surely promote the growth of factionalism than suppression and distrust; nothing will the more surely promote the growth of unity than unrestrained orderly expression and confidence.

Unity has brought us victory in the war. Unity has developed the Nation from the few thousands on the Atlantic seaboard to the many millions occupying the wide stretches from ocean to ocean. We should be striking from our own hands the lamp of experience if hereafter we should fail to guide our footsteps by the great light of National Unity.

For the present, for the immediate future, for the distant future, the part imposed upon the educated man is manifest. The possibilities for our own country and for the world lie far beyond our dreams. Let us dedicate ourselves, let each dedicate himself, to the cause with unselfishnness, with determination, with faith. In that way, and in that way alone, can we discharge our duties as college men. By no other means can we accomplish the vision of the founders of this institution.

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